

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 SAM-01 AID-20 PC-04 OMB-01

SY-10 OPR-02 DRC-01 (ISO) W
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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2297

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 1207

IMMEDIATE NIACT

EO 11652 GDS

TAGS PINT GT

SUBJ: POSSIBLE ELECTORAL DISTURBANCES

REF: GUATEMALA 1197

1. DURING MARCH 2 LUNCH AT HOME OF MIN FINANCE LAMPORT, JULIO LOWENTHAL, FINANCE DIRECTOR OF GOVT COALITION CAMPAIGN TOLD EMBOFF THAT GOG EXPECTED SERIOUS DISTURBANCES AFTER CLOSING OF POLLS ON MARCH 3 AND WAS TAKING ALL PRECAUTIONS TO CONTROL THEM. LOWENTHAL SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO MAINTAINING SECURITY FORCES ON FULL ALERT, GOVT COALITION SUPPORTERS WOULD BE BROUGHT INTO CAPITAL FROM COUNTRYSIDE IN LARGE NUMBERS ON AFTERNOON OF ELECTION DAY (MARCH 3) TO DEMONSTRATE IN FAVOR OF COALITION PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE LAUGERUD IN ORDER TO OFFSET PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF DEMONSTRATIONS EXPECTED IN FAVOR OPPOSITION FRONT CANDIDATE RIOS. LOWENTHAL SAID HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING LOGISTICS FOR THIS EFFORT. EMBOFF AVERRED THAT THIS TACTIC APPEARED BOTH UNWISE AND DANGEROUS, BUT THIS DID NOT SEEM TO HAVE MUCH EFFECT.
2. LOWENTHAL ALSO ASSERTED GOG WAS PREPARED TO TAKE EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES TO CONTROL ANY OPPOSITION EFFORT TO CREATE DISTURBANCES AND THAT DECREE (UNDATED) DECLARING "STATE OF EMERGENCY" WHICH WOULD SUSPEND CERTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES HAD ALREADY BEEN SIGNED BY PRESIDENT ARANA AND WAS READY TO BE PUT INTO EFFECT IF NEEDED. HE SAID HE FELT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO USE DECREE TO CONTROL

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SITUATION UNLESS RIOS CAME IN THIRD. IN THIS CONNECTION, HOWEVER,

FRONT LEADER VINICIO CEREZO TOLD US MARCH 1 THAT WHILE FRONT DOES HOPE TO HAVE DEMONSTRATION IN FRONT OF CITY HALL ON EVENING OF MARCH 3, IT DOES NOT PLAN OR WANT TO PROVOKE ANY CONFRONTATION.

3. LAMPORT WAS SOMEWHAT MORE SANGUINE THAN LOWENTHAL, SAYING THAT HE FELT THERE WOULD BE MINOR DISTURBANCES OVER NEXT FEW DAYS WHICH COULD BE CONTROLLED WITHOUT USE OF EMERGENCY DECREE. BOTH, OF COURSE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT LAUGERUD WOULD COME OUT ON TOP.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT COMPLETELY DISCOUNT LOWENTHAL'S FEARS, WE BELIEVE THAT LAMPORT'S ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION IS PROBABLY MORE ACCURATE. PLANS AND REPORTS OF THIS SORT CAN BE EXPECTED UNDER EXISTING CIRCUMSTANCES, AND PLANS SUCH AS THOSE MENTIONED BY LOWENTHAL ARE OFTEN NOT PUT INTO EFFECT. IF COALITION SYMPATHIZERS ARE IMPORTED INTO THE CAPITAL IN LARGE NUMBERS, THE POSSIBILITY OF SERIOUS DISTURBANCES WILL, OF COURSE BE INCREASED.

MELOY

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